



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JULY 28, 2006

CONTACT: GEORGE HARDEEN

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

OFFICE – 928-871-7917

CELL – 928-309-8532

georgehardeen@opvp.org

Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., urges parents to teach independence to children at education summit

To become independent, a student needs a good education, a good job, an income, one's own transportation and a home.

ROCK POINT, Ariz. – The purpose of education is to become an independent person, be able to support one's self and family, and ultimately become a contributing member of your community and nation.

This was Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr.'s, message to parents and staff at the *Tse' Nitsaa Deez'áhi Diné Bi'ólta'* 4th Education Summit here Thursday.

"The ultimate goal of education is independence," the President said. "When you become an independent person, you're not dependent your parents or grandparents, the government or anybody. You're doing for self. To me, that's the goal in life. It should be everybody's goal."

President Shirley said education is a two-fold process for Navajos. The first part is to learn the skills necessary to make it in today's world of education and work. The second part is to know your Navajo culture, language and history.

"When you go to college, you're supposed to know how to read. You're supposed to know how to write," he said. "The more you know, the better chance you have to become an independent person. Education will get you there."

Dr. Peter Belleto, director of the Rock Point School, said Navajo language and culture is the school's anchor and is integrated into the lower grades.

He said the mission of the school is a holistic student focus, Navajo culture and language, integrity and accountability, teamwork, flexibility, respect and excellence.



Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr. is presented with a Rock Point Community School jacket by Rock Point Community School Director Dr. Peter Belleto.

"Students are accepted for who they are and we're going to help them become the best person they can be," he said. "An Investment in human capital is one of the most important investments any institution can make."

The President told parents it was critical for them to become involved in their children's lives because there are forces that will distract them from success.



Shanda and Shonna Woody, 8 and 7 years old, look through the selection of books at a display at the Rock Point Community School Fourth Education Summit. Their mother, Stella Woody, brought them to the summit to keep them interested in school. Helping the girls is Rozen Begay, elementary site coordinator for 21st Century.

"If kids get involved in drugs, if they fail to strive in school, if they drop out of school, there's the greater chance that they will become dependent on their parents, their family or the government," he said. "If we're going to give our children a chance, we need to be aware of these things."

He said the Navajo Division of Public Safety is doing all it can to rid the road of drunk drivers by setting up checkpoints, educating their own staff about domestic violence and increasing the public's awareness about the encroachment of methamphetamine into Navajo communities.

He said the Office of the First Lady has mounted a continuous campaign on the same issues and has launched a Mothers Against Drunk Driving/DUI Task Force to expand police efforts.

The President also encouraged parents to talk to their children about teen sex. Having children when still teenagers is another way that young people are forced into a dependent state before having the chance to finish either their high school or college educations.

"If they don't have enough love at home, they veer off," the President said.

The President said the keys to personal independence is completing one's education, having an income, acquiring one's own transportation and getting one's own home.

The more education one has, the better chance a student has to find a good-paying, fulfilling job and career, he said. A job will bring the necessary income needed to be independent. But that will also require one's own vehicle so as to not be dependent on someone else to get around.

Finally, with each of these in place, a student is in a position to get their own home so they don't have to continue to be dependent on parents. Once a person has acquired these basics, they will be able to give back to their family by helping to support parents and grandparents, and even be able to give back to their community where they were raised or live, and their nation. That's called being a contributing member of society, he said.

"Being independent is a good feeling," the President said. "It's the best feeling. We really need to support our children to give them the wherewithal to succeed."

He told parents to teach their children to do what they choose with heart. That means giving it their all and becoming the best they can be. He said student should learn to have integrity in all they do and their dealings with people. That is the measure of a quality person, he said. And every pursuit should be done with a sacredness of mind, which embodies the teaching of Navajo grandparents.

###